

A more determined, if not coherent policy?

Republic of Serbia and contribution to multinational peace support operations in 2011

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Abstract:

Up until 2010, SAF contribution to multinational peace support operations (MNO) has been very limited, due to a number of factors and internal contradictions. Principal actor pushing Serbia's MNO policy forward should have been the MFA, however, in practice this has not always been the case. Legal framework, completed in 2009, failed to notice non-traditional actors of peace support operations. Still not fully represented in NATO, Serbia has just signed the Security Agreement with the EU. Yet, Serbia's deployments abroad are fast changing in terms of character. With five years of delay, by the end of 2011 SAF will send – for the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia – a designated unit to an MNO. Nevertheless, several issues, not having anything to do with horizontal cooperation between key actors will continue to hamper decision makers' ambition for greater engagement.

Key words: Serbia; peacekeeping; armed forces; police; decision; policy

¹ Authors are researchers in the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (www.ccmr-bg.org).

Acronyms and abbreviations:

BIC Bureau for International Cooperation

CNS Council for National Security

CPO Centre for Peace-keeping Operations of the Serbian Armed Forces

CSDP Common Security and Defence Policy

DIMC Department for International Military Cooperation

DUN Directorate for United Nations

EUNAVFOR European Union Naval Force Somalia

HQ SAF Headquarters of the Serbian Armed Forces

MF Ministry of Finance

MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MINUSTAH United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti

MNO Multi-national operations

MoD Ministry of Defence

MoI Ministry of Interior

MoJ Ministry of Justice

NBC Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defence Systems

RAF Romanian Armed Forces

SAF Serbian Armed Forces

SLF Serbia's Land Forces

STANAG Standardization Agreement

UNFICYP United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

UNIFIL United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Contribution to multinational peace support operations² constitutes an intriguing phenomenon. Soldiers of different armed forces come in contact; work together; exchange; and learn one from another. It is hard to imagine any activity of (international and military) cooperation that affects individual servicemen and women in a more profound way. First, they interact with their colleagues who are most likely to be (if not always) representatives of organizational cultures whose attitudes, beliefs and values may not correspond to their own. This is especially true for UN mandated and led operations. As a result of adjustment comes valuable experience, essentially a collection of individual responses to methods of learning, procedures, insights and real life situations..

For policy and decision makers of countries which are “in transition” towards becoming “consolidated” democracies, participation in MNO presents, all in one, (a) impetus, (b) shortcut and (c) formative experience in the (democratic) reform and modernization of armed forces. It presents an impetus since it offers a promise of tangible foreign policy benefits; and it is both a shortcut and formative experience because it raises important issues of interoperability. In the words of Serbia’s Minister of Defence, “we have to see what others can do in order to know where we are (*Author’s note – in terms of training, equipment, execution of tasks ahead*)”. For Serbian Armed Forces, MNO are the perfect proving ground, where recently built capacities and capabilities may be tested in adverse conditions.

Planning Serbia’s contribution to MNO: a complex and incoherent “playing field”

However, on the ground, SAF contribution to MNO has in so far been limited in scope and modest in numbers, due to a number of factors, or caveats. Some of these caveats are well known and have been outlined a number of times by decision makers, e.g. “Serbia will not send its soldiers to combat operations”.³ Others on the other hand can be understood solely through the prism of a wider political context of “post-Kosovo-2008-illegal-from-the-Serbian-point-of-view-declaration-of-independence”, hiding a number of challenges or “traps” for those uninformed of the official discourse. This translates into (1) SAF refraining

² From here on we will refer to “multinational operations” or just “MNO” in short. Other acronyms will be presented in brackets.

³ This point of view is not shared by all decision (or opinion) makers. Take the MP (and member of Committee on Defence and Security) Vlado Stanković’s statement “Why shouldn’t Serbia’s military go to Afghanistan tomorrow?” <http://www.youtube.com/user/bezbednostpomeri#p/u/3/1w-zh-iDeyk> (delivered during the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy’s event, “Serbia and Multinational Operations”, June 16, 2010; statement available in Serbian language only)

from participation in NATO-led operations, since in December 2007 Serbia has excluded itself – to an undefined period of time – from any military alliance. Also, (2) policy and decision makers will look for “alternatives”, with more time and resources being allocated to operations led under the clout of EU’s developing Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The fact that the EU (unlike NATO) presents its members with no system of collective defence seems irrelevant at the point.⁴

The “playing field” of MNO is filled by the Centre for Peace Support Operations (CPO) under the HQ of the SAF; Department for International Military Cooperation (DIMC) in the Ministry of Defence (MoD); Bureau for International Cooperation (BIC) in the Ministry of Interior (MoI); and Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ (MFA) Directorate for the United Nations (DUN).

These units of organization are then joined by several prime policy actors. First, it is up to MoD and MoI to draft the “Annual Plan of Participation in Multinational Operations” (*Godišnji plan učešća u multinacionalnim operacijama* in Serbian). What follows is a debate in the National Assembly, first on the level of the parliamentary committee, and then plenary, after which the Plan gets adopted. Every single decision to send SAF in MNO is authorized by the President; however, the decision to send police forces is sanctioned by the Government. Decisions made by the President and the Government are then enforced by ministers. Similar decision-making and processing system are evident in surrounding countries, namely Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. This may enable policy planners in Serbia to learn from other countries’ experiences and to improve their own policies.

In theory, leading actor in Serbia’s MNO policy should be the MFA. First of all, MFA is involved in what is perhaps the most problematic task of all, which is choosing the operation Serbia will contribute to. MFA either leads or coordinates negotiations with other countries and most importantly, the UN. Representatives of this institution sit in an interagency working group tasked with planning, preparing and executing Serbia’s contribution to MNO, along with colleagues from the MoD, MoI, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry of Finance (MF).

⁴ True to the point, the Treaty of Lisbon contains a “solidarity clause” indicating that “the Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the target of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster”.

Three separate problems come to mind in relation to this. First, interagency working group is not a permanent, but an *ad hoc* body. MFA also has to take into full respect relevant ministries' assessment whether contribution to a specific operation would be beneficial or not. There is also the omnipresent issue of (building) capacities: MNO related activities are in fact limited to DUN, despite the (rather recent) establishment of Directorates responsible for CSDP and NATO within the MFA.

“Omnipresent” need for building capacities was evident when the first Annual Plan – which took 6 months to complete – was sent to ministries involved in the process. MoD, which took the lead when document was drafted, quizzed other institutions on their human resources, material equipment, and cost estimates. Besides MoI, not a single ministry expressed its desire to join. Less than a year later, when the second Annual Plan was drafted, results were the same.

“The playing field” has been so far dominated by SAF and MoI. Advantages of including non-traditional actors, such as above-mentioned MFA and MoJ have not been taken into consideration. A different – more holistic – approach would imply that non-traditional actors, in line with a widened understanding of security (sector) are equally welcome. However, legal framework fails to mention MFA, MoJ or any other institution explicitly. Instead, a vague formulation, “employees in state administration” is used to describe capacities other than SAF and MoI. In result, there is no incentive for other actors to come aboard. There is no initiative at all to take part in post-conflict stabilisation through joint engagements of MoI, MFA and MoJ. No one seems to perceive the rising demand for election observation missions, where strong expertise has been developed within the civil society. Also, no one has contemplated the simple idea of sending agricultural engineers to facilitate agricultural projects.

It is strange that in a time when regional comparative studies constitute a prerequisite to policy formulation, solutions adopted by, e.g. Croatia made no impression on writers of Serbia's Law on MNO . Under the mandate of any Croatian participant come “activities of assistance to development of democracy, rule of law and human rights protection”. This strikes us as odd, since we have been informed that the “Croatian Law” had actually been consulted. That said, actors of Serbia's security sector which might significantly contribute – judiciary, civil defence – are not explicitly mentioned in the Law. Judging by the official discourse, it is questionable whether they will be part of any future engagement at all.

What is also striking is how the Council for National Security (CNS) – latest and arguably most important addition to this framework – actually plays no role in planning and executing MNO. Yet this has everything to do with how the CNS was introduced in the first place: with the *post festum* Law on the Basic Structure of the Security and Intelligence Services of the Republic of Serbia (2007). Concerned with the growing need to gather all senior decision makers and help them coordinate key decisions related to security of Serbia, up until now CNS has never taken into consideration the (growing) field of MNO. This comes as more of a surprise since holders of the highest authority – ministers of defence, interior and foreign affairs, heads of security and intelligence services, the President of the National Assembly and the President himself – are all members of the CNS.

Signs of a more ambitious policy to come: 2009 to 2011 developments

October 2009 marked the “turning point” in Serbia’s engagement. It was then that the new Law (full name: *on using armed and other defence forces in multinational operations outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia*) was adopted in the National Assembly. Its most important feature was the new definition of operations. Instead of outdated and morally problematic “peace operations”, a new term was adopted, “multinational operations”. This was followed by a wider description of possible grounds for engagement besides traditional peacekeeping, in which all armed forces of former Yugoslavia were since 1950’s. These new missions are now defined in article 2 of the Law, presented as “joint defence operations” “under legal acts regulating matters of defence“, and „operations of providing assistance in answering effects of terrorism and terrorist acts of greater size“.

Also, with the legal framework in place, potential role of police forces has been finally recognized. Prior to October 2009, only did the Law on Police (2005) proscribe participation in MNO as a legal mission for Serbia’s police forces.⁵ Serbia’s police officers have so far been deployed – not seconded - to UN mandated and led operations.⁶ As well as their colleagues from the SAF, they took the role of (ceasefire and demarcation) observers. Only in MINUSTAH were they provided with an executive mandate, and able to intervene directly by overriding local authorities.

⁵ Law on Police (2005), article 19, paragraph 5

⁶ Option of seconding personnel, where individual police officers are practically employed by the UN for a certain period of time has not so far been considered.

The Annual Plan for 2010 demanded 98 servicemen and women of the SAF deployed to UN operations in Congo, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Lebanon and Cyprus, with 36 police officers taking part in UN operations in Liberia and Haiti.⁷ In January 2011, Republic of Serbia was still taking part only in UN led operations, with 27 soldiers and 11 police officers deployed at a time.

The real shift, however, has been noted in the nature of deployment. In three operations, soldiers of the SAF are part of other nations' contingents: Norwegian in Chad, Hungarian-Slovak in Cyprus and Spanish in Lebanon. Speaking in February 2011, Serbia's Minister of Defence announced how, for the very first time, SAF will join an EU operation. Two officers of the River Flotilla are expected to board a Greek vessel and engage (with servicemen of eight different countries) in prevention and combat against piracy, which is a persistent threat along the coast of Somalia.⁸ All these contributions were therefore modest in numbers, but a sign of things to come.

Participation of SAF personnel in MNO (as of January 2011)

	8	Medical evacuation team AMET-15 comprised of 2 medical doctors and 4 medical technicians; 1 officer and 1 non commissioned officer (NCO) at operation's HQ
Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO)		
Liberia (UNMIL)	4	Officers – military observers

⁷ "Operations from Congo to Haiti", *Večernje novosti* newspapers, June 3, 2010

⁸ "Serbian Peacekeepers to join Greeks on the shores of Somalia", *Tanjug* News Agency, February 11, 2011

Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI)	3	Officers – military observers
Cyprus (UNFICYP)	7	Team UNFICYP-1 comprised of 1 officer at the operation's HQ, 2 NCOs, 4 patrol members (3 NCOs and 1 professional soldier)
Lebanon (UNIFIL)	5	Team UNIFIL- 1 comprised of 5 officers at operation's HQ
Total	27	
Participation of MoI personnel in MNO		
Liberia (UNMIL)	6	Six police officers as part of the CIVPOL contingent
Haiti (MINUSTAH)	5	Five police officers, special forces designation (Serbian Gendarmerie, Anti-Terrorist Unit, etc.) perform training of Haitian law enforcement agencies
Total	11	

UN operation in Lebanon (UNIFIL) should become the destination for at least one medical team and, later on, a unit (of unknown size) of military police.⁹ In February, Assistant Defence Minister Tanja Miscevic presented to MPs sitting in the National Assembly Committee for Defence and Security that not only EUNAVFOR, but EUTM in Uganda should also become one of the EU led operations SAF will take part in.¹⁰ Now that the long awaited Security Agreement with the EU was signed, technical agreement establishing legal grounds for contribution of Serbia's medical team to EUTM will soon follow.¹¹

Finally and most importantly, the 2011 Action Plan highlighted how, by the end of the year, Serbia will send an infantry platoon to UNFICYP, and an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team to UNIFIL. Final preparations are apparently under way. Also, in the "White Book of Defence of the Republic of Serbia" this newly found resolve was reaffirmed. Through this important document, decision makers announced how "for the purpose of participation in MNO, specific forces of the Army and the system of defence will be designated then trained both in country and abroad" and that "the system of defence will, through continuous development, present its own capacities in light of preparation for MNO".¹²

SAF are in fact very close to having its first ever fully trained unit designated for MNO. Not without delay, that is. As early as 2005, SAF was undertaking training of unit(s) for MNO, one engineers' company, one infantry company with accompanying medical unit and a platoon of military police. Due to lack of political will for deployment, this resource eventually became outdated.¹³

First designated unit being prepared for participation in an MNO is a motorized infantry company of the Third Brigade of Serbia's Land Forces (SLF), comprised of soldiers from the 31st and 32nd Infantry Battalion, 39th Logistics Battalion and 310th Engineer Battalion. This company will be comprised of professionals only. Training itself began on February 18, 2010.¹⁴ Part of this unit has already taken part in an exercise organized at the Romanian Armed Forces (RAF) Babadag military training facility. There they worked together with

⁹ "Debate in the National Assembly: SAF participation in MNO", *Odbrana* magazine No. 131: p. 6.

¹⁰ "Serbia to join two EU led peace support operations", *Fonet* News Agency, February 21, 2011

¹¹ "On military cooperation between Serbia and France", *Tanjug* News Agency, April 7, 2011

¹² Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, 2011, "White Book of Defence of the Republic of Serbia", http://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/dokumenta/strategije/bela_knjiga/Bela_Knjiga-Srpski.pdf (accessed April 28, 2011)

¹³ Article 30, paragraph 3 of Serbia's Law on (using armed forces and other defence forces in multinational operations outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia) states that once training is completed, unit may be used in a period of three years after which it must be sent to training again.

¹⁴ "In Front of the Eyes of the World: Preparing First Designated Unit for Multinational Operations", *Odbrana* magazine No. 129, p. 20-21

members of both RAF and the US Army, preparing for deployment to ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

In February 2011, second part of collective training was initiated, to be completed in July 2011. After this the unit will be sent as a whole to military exercises which are carried out with live ammunition. Then every soldier and (commanding) officer will be separately evaluated. At the very end of this lengthy process, SAF will have at its disposal one infantry platoon; one section of military police; and one NBC section. Due to the requirement of rotation of forces, one third of the resource provided by the designated unit will be available for mission at any time.¹⁵

One should not jump to a conclusion, however. Earlier in 2010, while personnel was undertaking its first tours of duty within the Norwegian contingent, policy makers discussed whether SAF can manage to send an entire field hospital on its own. After it became evident that funds necessary for sending 120 to 150 soldiers (doctors, technicians, force protection etc.) were nowhere to be found, this idea was discarded.¹⁶ It therefore remains to be seen whether the end of 2011 deadline is realistic.

Internal limiting factors: some issues are here to stay

Yet many of the issues that hamper decision makers' ambition for greater engagement still have nothing to do with horizontal cooperation between key actors. First, MoI's capacities for managing police officers' contribution to MNO continue to be extremely limited. By acts that regulate the internal organization of this Ministry, only two employees have been assigned to duties related to MNO; only one position has been actually staffed. This stands in sharp contrast with SAF's CPO, where a number of soldiers and civil servants – close to 70 – are involved in different phases of Serbia's contribution.

MoI also encounters a range of problems when planning and implementing language training. Since 2003, OSCE Mission to Serbia has supported foreign language training, but with partial success. This was due to several key factors. Any intensive course would ask officers to take a four month long leave from duty in order to keep up. Instead, groups met several times per

¹⁵ This "logic" of rotation is simple: one third of the unit is deployed, one third is preparing, and one third is resting and refitting. In this particular case, one third of a company comprises a platoon, while one third of a platoon comprises a section.

¹⁶ "Serbia in Chad peace support operation", *Euro Atlantic Initiative* magazine, No. 11

week, for several hours, all in course of several months. In addition, course contents were not adjusted to police officers' needs, and did not refer to terminology police officers use when handling their daily business.

Limited knowledge of English and French (meaning: limited numbers of speakers of these two languages) could also be one of the reasons why the SAF have still not committed a compact unit to any MNO. Yet, since obtaining interoperability has been perceived as one of SAF strategic priorities, Military Academy of Serbia has been implementing NATO STANAG 6001 when organizing and executing foreign language training. Above-mentioned designated unit has received its own centre for learning of English language, equipped with lecture rooms, high-quality audio facilities and computers.

Apart from debriefing which is mandatory and is executed no later than ten days upon return, there seems to be no other mechanism for institutionalization of knowledge and experience members of SAF and MoI gain while in operation. Only in SAF there is an informal practice of assigning servicemen and women to organizational units concerned with matters of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). In reverse, this CIMIC approach shaped in Serbia, in post conflict, multiethnic environment could be later used as a useful tool in MNO. This policy has nevertheless been so far neglected.

Single greatest challenge or obstacle to any future participation is interoperability, or the lack of ability to take part in joint operations with other countries' armed forces. At the moment, platoon sized formation is at best what SAF can offer to the UN, EU, or any other partner. Smaller in size than a battalion or a company, incapable of independent action, this formation could be viable only within a "parent" contingent. This is exactly the path decision makers in Serbia have chosen, as we have displayed before. As long as servicemen and women are sent within a smaller team, there is no problem. The moment a contingent greater in size gets deployed there is a strong chance that some of the assigned soldiers (or police officers) will not understand any language other than their own. For instance, when Romanian forces deployed to Iraq, knowledge of English was fairly limited in the lower ranks: 80% of officers, 60% of NCOs and no more than 40% of soldiers spoke the language. RAF overcame this by having fluent speakers for liaison officers.

Right up until 2010, even if individual servicemen or women have participated in an operation there was no guarantee that his or hers career might advance in any way. This has changed since: in internal vacancy notices published in SAF magazines ("Odbrana"), official

journals and web sites, when deciding on candidates to choose, previous experience of deployment to an MNO is taken as a factor.

Since until January 2011 the full professionalization of the SAF participation was possible only on voluntary basis, the only remaining incentive for soldiers and police officers was money. When abroad, Serbia's "blue helmets" are paid from \$1050 to \$3000, not counting the salary they regularly receive at home. It is therefore easy to understand why over 5,000 members of SAF are open to participation in MNO.¹⁷ Still, as CPO representatives' had stated repeatedly, money plays a role only up to a certain level.

Conclusion remarks: a coherent and more open-minded system is needed

Adoption of the 2011 Annual Plan speaks of significant political ambition regarding Serbia and MNO. However, only after a designated unit is deployed, Serbia's presence will be felt and appreciated. The existing system needs to become coherent, with improved capacity to run the process, widen the base of professionals who are capable and willing to deploy, and raise the level of interoperability. The fact that the draft of the Law was written by the MoD left a lasting impression on state policy towards MNO: it is largely militarized and fails to perceive other, namely civilian actors in the *arena*.

The questions that remain unanswered are what our interest is, and where and how do we want to participate. So far, attitude of MoD and MoI towards MNO has been fragmented and at times too much focused on public relations. Rather shy and almost unwilling presence of MFA translates into a lack of initiative coming from other ministries. This has created a confusing image in the public opinion and led towards criticism. Population stays largely uninformed and confused on how exactly Serbia might benefit by participating in MNO. This is a risk that decision makers can not afford – if increasing participation is already on the table.

¹⁷ "Debate in the National Assembly", Ibid

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